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Publication date:
2013

Document Version
Early version, also known as pre-print

Citation for published version (APA):
Jagd, S. (2013). *Criticism and the Emergence of Novelty in Organizations*. Paper presented at Fifth International Symposium on Process Organization Studies, Chania, Greece.

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Criticism and the Emergence of Novelty in Organizations

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Keywords: Criticism; critique; justification; pragmatic sociology; process; novelty

Abstract

This paper explores how criticism may act as driver of organizational novelty and change. Existing organizational literature tends to see criticism as an extraordinary phenomenon. Inspired by the different notions of critique in French Pragmatic Sociology the phenomenon of criticism is in this paper seen as part of ordinary practices performed by actors contributing to the production of novelty in organizations through chains of critique and justification. The particular contribution of this paper is an analysis of how French pragmatic sociology may contribute towards an understanding the role of criticism in organizational life. I point to three different types of critique explored in French Pragmatic Sociology. First, the reformist form of critique aiming at perfecting a given order of worth. Second, the radical form of critique based on conflicting orders of worth. And last, the critique based on different regimes of engagements. Based on illustration from a case study, I argue that these three different forms of critique may be seen as three simultaneous processes leading to organizational novelty in three radically different ways.

Introduction

This paper explores the phenomenon of criticism as driver of organizational novelty and change. While existing organizational literature tends to see criticism as an extraordinary phenomenon in this paper the phenomenon of criticism is seen as part of ordinary practices performed by actors contributing to the production of novelty in organizations through chains of critique and justification. From this perspective novelty is a potential in all situations that may or may not be released, depending on the actors involved. The particular contribution of this paper is an analysis of how French pragmatic sociology may contribute towards an understanding the role of criticism in organizational life. Due to the focus of pragmatic sociology on micro-processes of critique and justification it is particularly interesting to explore how this perspective may help exploring how micro-processes of critique contribute to organizational novelty.

The paper is structured in the following sections. First, I discuss how the notions of criticism and critical practices has been applied in organization studies pointing to the need for explicitly exploring criticism as part of the ordinary practices performed by actors in organizations. Secondly, I present the approach to critique and criticism recently developed by the French sociologist Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot as *Pragmatic Sociology* or *Sociology of Critique* stressing the importance of three key concepts: *critique*, *test* and *compromise*. I particularly discuss three different types of critique explored in Pragmatic Sociology. First, the reformist form of critique aiming at perfecting a given order of worth. This form of (internal) critique is quite often neglected in organizational studies though it may be a central part of the organizational ‘soul’. Second, the radical form of critique based on conflicting orders of worth. And last, the critique based on different regimes of engagements. This form of critique covers at least two different types of conflicts and criticisms. On the one side the conflicts between organizational policies and plans and wider orders of worth. And, on the other side, conflicts between personal routines and values and organizational policies and plans.

In the following section these three different forms of critique are illustrated by data from a case study of value based leadership in a machine workshop revealing some of the processes whereby critique gives rise both to stability and to novelty and change in organizations. Last, I summarize and discuss how these three different critical processes may help reveal criticism as

intrinsic to everyday organizational processes. These three different forms of critique may be seen as three simultaneous processes leading to organizational novelty in three radically different ways.

The Notion of Critique and Criticism

The notions of critique and criticism implies two different meanings for organizational researchers (Messner et al., 2008). A scientific notion of critique refers to the practice of theoretical investigation into a subject area. Such critique is often considered to be more informed than lay actors' everyday reflections on their actions. Second, critique may refer to a judgment or evaluation pointing to particular negative aspects of an object or a practice. This last meaning refers in contrast to the first to an activity performed by lay actors. In this paper I focus on critique in the last meaning as an activity performed by actors as part of their everyday activity.

In critical management studies researchers have particularly studied criticism as a form of protest or resistance against managerial goals and strategies (Alvesson et al., 2009). From this perspective criticism is something exceptional rather than part of everyday ordinary practices. In this paper I attempt to explore criticism as part of ordinary practices performed by actors in organizations. How can we understand criticism as part of ordinary practices performed by actors in organizations as part of their attempts to coordinate their actions.

Criticism as part of everyday practice is central for the theoretical approach of pragmatic sociology mainly developed by the French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot (Boltanski, 2011; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005a; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005b; Boltanski et al., 1984; Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999; Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006; Thévenot, 2001b; Thévenot, 2006; Thévenot, 2007; Thévenot, 2011a; Thévenot, 2013a; Thévenot, 2013b). Boltanski and Thévenot explore the role of criticism performed by actors, developing a *sociology of critique*, partly in contrast to Pierre Bourdieu's *critical sociology*, as recently summarized by Luc Boltanski:

'The main criticism we have made of critical sociology is, briefly put, its overarching character and the distance at which it holds itself from the critical capacities developed by actors in the situations of everyday life. The pragmatic sociology of critique, by contrast, fully acknowledges actors' critical capacities and the creativity with which they engage in interpretation and action *en situation*.' (Boltanski, 2011, p. 43)

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What is in particular rejected is the asymmetry found in the Bourdieusian paradigm between the sociologist ‘enlightened by the light of his science and ordinary people sunk in illusion’ ((Boltanski, 2011, p. 23). Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot and their group of researchers conducted studies of disputes and critiques in diverse areas during the 1980s and 1990s revealing the critical capacities of actors:

‘The *actors* whom these works have made visible were very different from the agents who feature in the critical sociology of domination. They were always active, not passive. They were frankly critical, even critical in the manner of critical sociologists, forever unmasking the hidden intentions and biases of their opponents – often related to their social position – mobilizing to this end various schemas taken from critical sociology, diffused by education or the media. They made their demands, denounced injustices, produced evidence in support of their complaints, or constructed arguments to justify themselves in the face of the critiques to which they were themselves subjected. Envisaged thus, the social world does not appear to be the site of domination endured passively and unconsciously, but instead as a space shot through by a multiplicity of disputes, critiques, disagreements and attempts to re-establish locally agreements that are always fragile.’ (Boltanski, 2011, p. 26-27)

The framework of pragmatic sociology has received growing attention in organizations studies and has now been applied in a large variety of studies (Annisette and Richardson, 2011; Cloutier, 2009; Cloutier and Langley, 2007; Cloutier and Langley, 2013; Daigle and Rouleau, 2010; Denis et al., 2007; Fronda and Moriceau, 2008; Hervieux et al., 2010; Jagd, 2011; Mesny and Mailhot, 2007; Patriotta et al., 2011; Stark, 2009).

In the following section, I summarize the basic assumptions and concept of French Pragmatic Sociology aiming at exploring how this approach could contribute to the understanding of the processes relating criticism and novelty in organizations.

French Pragmatic Sociology: A Sociology of Critique

Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot have in their classical work *On Justification* (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999; Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006) presented a theoretical framework of plural orders of worth that may explain how different forms of criticism may lead to the emergence of different forms of novelties in organizations.

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In pragmatic sociology the social world is a space intersected by a multitude of disputes, critiques, disagreements and attempts to produce fragile local agreements. Pragmatic sociology is concerned with the analysis of how actors reflexively do different types of ‘justification work’ criticizing or justifying particular orders of worth in specific situations (Boltanski, 2011).

Based on empirical work in the 1980s Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot developed their theoretical framework during the 1980s. The theoretical model presented in *On Justification* (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006) is primarily seen as relevant in situations of public disputes in which action is confronted with critique. In order to invoke justice in these situations it is necessary to activate principles of equivalence that permit evaluating the relative values of the beings engaged in the dispute, or their worth.

The regime of justification is not expected to cover all types of action, but only those in which actors attempt to make common agreements. The regime of justification may be contrasted to other regimes of action following Luc Boltanski (Boltanski, 1990; Boltanski, 2012) who identified four different regimes of action: the regime of peace in fairness based on routines and regularities as a means of stabilizing social interaction; the regime of peace in agape; the regime of dispute in violence; and last the regime of dispute in justice in which it is necessary to justify yourself to be seen as legitimate by other actors. Social relations may be seen as reversible in the sense that situations may pass from one regime to the other, and actors are assumed having the competencies to act in these regimes and to move from one regime to another.

In *On Justification* (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006) Boltanski and Thévenot develop a general framework for the analysis of processes of justification. Actors are seen as subjected to an imperative of justification. Actors who criticize other persons have to justify their criticism and actors who are criticized have to justify their actions. Both criticism and justification have to follow the same rules of acceptability. Thus, the theoretical framework should be able to handle both agreement and disagreement.

Generalizing earlier empirical findings, Boltanski and Thévenot found six orders of justification or polities, elaborated in detail in political philosophical texts as ideal typical orders of worth, and each linked to a general principle: the inspired polity, the domestic polity, the polity of fame, the civic polity, the market polity, and the industrial polity. While the notion of polity describes abstract models of orders of justification, the notion of worlds describes the concrete

unfolding of orders of worth (Nachi, 2006, p. 128) where objects are qualified with respect to one particular polity:

$$\text{world} = \text{polity} + \text{objects}$$

Based on the six orders of worth Boltanski and Thévenot found six common worlds: In the *world of inspiration* worth rests upon the attainment of a state of grace, independent of recognition by others. Its expressions may be diverse: holiness, creativity, imagination, artistic sensibility. In the *domestic world* people's worth rests on their hierarchical position in a chain of personal dependencies as expressed by their esteem and reputation. In the *world of fame* people's worth is expressed in the number of individuals who grant their recognition. Worth is unrelated to personal dependencies and to the person's self-esteem. In the *civic world* primordial importance is attached to collective beings, not to individual persons. Human beings may be worthy to the extent that they belong to or represent collectives. Praiseworthy relationships are those involving or mobilizing people for a collective action. The civic world then counteracts the personal dependencies on which the domestic world is based, as well as the opinion of others as in the world of fame. The *market world* must not be mixed up with the sphere of economic relations, since economic relations are based on at least two main forms of coordination, by the market and by the industrial order. In the market world, actions are motivated by the desires of individuals driving them to possess the same rare goods. The *industrial world* is the world of technological objects and scientific methods. In this world worth is related to productivity and efficiency.

The reference to qualified things makes it possible to show how practices unfold in common worlds. Judgments and justifications are tested in trials that bring into play the objects that are involved with persons in the situations being judged. The hypothesis is that actors, on the same day and in the same social space, may refer to different worlds when they shift from one situation to another. In order to test this hypothesis Boltanski and Thévenot in *On Justification* studied how these different orders of worth are used in the same social space, in business organizations.

In addition to the analysis of the plural orders of worth an important dimension in pragmatic sociology is the concepts developed for analyzing the unfolding of action in pluralistic contexts. In order to lay out a basic framework for exploring the link between criticism and the emergence of novelty in organization I will present three core concepts in pragmatic sociology: the notions of critique, the test and the compromise.

Critique

Critique is seen as a key element in the unfolding of practices, since the social acceptance of particular forms of justifications are tested by continuous processes of critique, testing and adjustments of agreements in order to account for aspects of action that cannot be justified. The possibility of critique is based on the plurality of interpretations of the world, as illustrated by the six distinct orders of worth elaborated by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999; Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006) and by the three different regimes of engagements elaborated by Laurent Thévenot (Thévenot, 2001b; Thévenot, 2006; Thévenot, 2007; Thévenot, 2011a).

Boltanski sees actors as ‘almost without interruption, inserted into chains of critique and justification, so that the person who finds him or herself under the reflectors of critique tries to justify him or herself and also asks his/her adversary to justify the criticisms he/she advances. Justifications and critique cannot [however] be just this and that, they need to be founded to acquire robustness.’ (Boltanski in (Blokker, 2011)). Chains of critique and justification are thus not merely a discursive matter, but include a moment of confrontation with reality – the test – in which, the claims made can be verified in terms of their foundation (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006).

Following Paul Blokker (Blokker, 2011) critique in pragmatic sociology takes largely two forms. The first form is a *corrective or reformist critique*. The intent of reformist critique is to denounce injustice because of an incomplete implementation of just principles. When such ‘internal’ critique is acknowledged the existing interpretations of reality will be fortified. Reformist critique comes through in tests of reality in which the outcome usually is the confirmation and strengthening of the existing order. But the reformist critique may also be accompanied by an unsettling effect by drawing attention to instability and incongruence in the existing order.

The second form of critique, *radical critique*, proposes a different way of achieving a just reality by drawing attention to other relevant orders of worth. When a radical critique is successful it will lead to a shift in the dominant arrangements and their justifications.

The elaborations of critique by Luc Boltanski are extended by Laurent Thévenot’s recent discussion of critique in the context of engagements (Thévenot, 1990; Thévenot, 2006; Thévenot, 2007; Thévenot, 2011a; Thévenot, 2011b; Thévenot, 2011c; Thévenot, 2013a; Thévenot, 2013b), in contrast to the public forms of critique conceptualized in *On Justification*. Thévenot distinguishes

between three regimes of engagement, the *regime of familiar engagement*, the local and personalized attachment to the world; the *regime of engagement with a plan*, involving plans and projects and drawing on the liberal grammar of individual choice; and the *regime of publicly justifiable engagement* explored in *On Justification*. Thévenot relates criticism to the complaint of undue sacrifice (Thévenot, 2011a) due to structural tyranny from one regime of engagement upon another. An example in contemporary ‘network capitalism’ the regime of engagement with a plan (involving individual projects, responsibility and choices) tends to stifle the regime of familiar engagements, the local and personal attachments to the world.

Test

The notion of the test plays a central role in pragmatic sociology. The notion of test is invoked to solve a disagreement over ‘the way worths have been distributed in the situation at hand’ (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p. 133). The test may reveal the proper hierarchy of persons and objects involved. Who are ‘high performers’ in relation to the particular order of worth? Are the objects properly applied and adjusted to the order of worth?

Reformist critique is related to a test of the ‘state of worth’ questioning whether the principles appropriate to a situation are being correctly applied. Radical critique, in contrast, is related to a test of ‘orders of worth’ questioning the appropriateness of principles being applied in a particular situation (Dansou and Langley, 2012).

Compromise

The notion of compromise may be seen as the cornerstone of pragmatic sociology (Nachi, 2004; Nachi, 2006). When there are conflicting orders of worth and the use of violence is excluded as usually in organizations as a way of imposing a viewpoint compromise is necessary to attain a common good (Taupin, 2012). Compromise is intended to solve conflicts of worth by using arguments and justifications relating to several polities:

‘In a compromise, people agree to come to terms, that is, to suspend a clash – a dispute involving more than one world – without settling it through recourse to a test in just one of the worlds. The situation remains composite, but a clash is averted’ (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p. 277).

The most important contribution from pragmatic sociology is probably the elaboration of compromising work. In a compromise ‘people agree to come to terms, that is to suspend a clash – a

dispute involving more than one world – without settling it through recourse to a test in just one of the worlds. The situation remains composite, but a clash is averted. (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p. 277). A compromise then suggests the possibility of a principle that can take judgments based on objects stemming from different worlds and make them compatible. The concept of compromise makes it possible to describe an appearance of stability within which a dynamic form remains, embodied in the fundamental opposition between irreconcilable worths. The compromise remains fragile as long as it cannot be related to a form of common good that is constitutive of a polity since the establishment of a compromise does not allow persons to be ordered according to a relevant worth.

It should be stressed that the notion of compromises in pragmatic sociology is a positive notion pointing to the possibility to satisfy two or more orders of worth at the same time and not a negative notion indicating the both parties have not obtained what they wanted.

Since organizations are characterized as pluralistic setting with multiple orders of worth it follows that perhaps the most important processes in organizations are the ongoing establishment, adjustment and stabilization of compromises. Organizations may be characterized as ‘compromising machines’ (Thévenot, 2001a). Following Pragmatic Sociology “stability” in organizations may be seen as produced by balancing processes between conflicting orders of worth mobilised by actors. Compromises may appear stable but are in fact only kept in this balance by the activities performed by actors in stabilizing and adjusting compromises.

Critique and the Production of Novelty in Organizations: A Case Study

In this section I explore how these different forms of critique lead to the production of different types of novelties in organizations drawing on a case study¹ conducted in a machine workshop, here

¹ The case study was part of research project on the involvement of employees in values based management projects organized by the Danish Trade Union Congress and financed by the EU Social Fund. The researchers had the role of external evaluators of the project. The group of researchers followed the project from month 2006 to April 2007 and conducted in depth case studies in some of the participating organizations. The author was responsible for the case study of the machine workshop reported here.

The project employed a mixed methods design, including participant observation, interviews, and formal documents. The research methods included:

- Qualitative interviews with project leader and with external consultants at different phases of the project;

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named ACP. The company founded in 1981 now employ more than 200 employees in the production factories in Denmark and Dallas, Texas, and at sales and service offices in Germany, Italy, Japan and China. The company has three different divisions:

- *Ancillary division* producing OEM-parts for other printing machine producers and to the offset and flexo-printing industry;
- *Converting division* producing customer designed large scale printing machines for the international packaging industry; and
- *Production division* that produces machine parts to local customers.

Among the important international customers is Tetra Pak who since the late 1990s has ordered more than 50 specially designed printing machines from ACP.

The customer designed order production involves a large group of employees planning and drawing the printing machines and delivering workshop drawings for production workers. Thus the company employees people with very different educations and working experience, such as skilled metal workers, engineers and draughtsmen.

In the following the management by values project, labelled *Licence to Action*-project, is briefly presented. The goal of the specific project was to explore the effects of involving employees in the translation of company values into changes of every-day working practices. The name of the project, *Licence to Act*, was intended to signify that all employees have a licence to act in accordance with company values, without asking for approval from managers.

The history of the company since its establishment in 1981 was dominated by the industrial order of worth. The company have survived by constantly developing products and processes in close co-operation with international customers demanding a very high quality and reliability of the machines and machine-parts delivered. The involvement of employees in the process of continuous

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- Participant observation of employee seminars;
 - Qualitative interviews with employees from different parts of the company (45-90 min). The interviews were conducted in the early phase and again with the same employees before the formal ending of the project;
 - Documents from the company in general and documents produced as part of the project included minutes from project-coordination meetings held once a month during the project, documents from employee seminars, and summary report of these seminars produced external consultants.

development of product quality was found to be of crucial importance for keeping the high level of quality that was seen as essential for sustaining the competitive advantage in the future.

In the following sections I explore how different forms of critique tend to produce different forms of novelty.

Reformist Critique, Confirmation of a Dominating Order of Worth and Novelty as Perfection

When an organization is characterized by one dominating order of worth criticism may nevertheless be formulated that do not aim at challenging this order of worth but rather aim at testing or perfecting the actualization of this particular order of worth. The notion of *reformist critique* is applied to this form of critique directed towards an incomplete implementation of just principles without challenging the dominating order of worth.

Reformist critique is then directed not towards the very organizing principle which actors draw upon but instead questioning the particular application of the generally accepted organizing principle. Critique may be directed towards the way individuals and things are tested according the dominating order of worth or critique may be directed towards the actions of individuals that collide in some way or another with the key principles of the dominating order of worth.

Actors may seek to prevent clashes by setting up situations that ‘hold together’ described by Boltanski and Thévenot as ‘coherent in a single world’ (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006, p. 228). The constructions of situations that hold together is based on an arrangement of natural objects that serves to stabilize persons by attaching them to the world involved. If a deficiency in relation to the superior common principle is revealed by criticism actors may attempt to adjust objects and the persons in order to attempt to further particular superior principle of this order of worth. It may be expected that reformist or ‘internal’ critique do not lead to novelty and changes. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this form of critique, which may be pointing towards the lack of qualities central to the superior higher principle, often lead to processes of adjustments that produce novelties often in the form of incremental changes in processes and products. Reformist critique may also contribute to novelty in organizations in another often overlooked way. The critique and the actions and justification following the critique most often result in the confirmation and strengthening of the existing order by making it more ‘just’ and legitimate. But the critique may nevertheless also be accompanied by an ‘unsettling effect’ because it draws attention to incongruence in the existing order. The latter occurs when a reformist critique makes evident latent contradictions or points to a

divergence between what *ought* to be tested according to the particular order of worth and what *is* actually tested.

The industrial order of worth is the most important order of worth in ACP-company. The main activities concern the physical production of printing machines and machine parts and the main area of critique concern the quality of products and the efficient management of production processes. Critique concerning quality of the products is mainly formulated by customers regularly invited to meetings in the company to discuss experiences of quality problems. Here smaller and bigger problems will be discussed and problems of product quality can be corrected. Since products are not sold on the market as standard product but are special designed for the customer need the ultimate test of product quality is customers experiencing satisfactory performing printing machines.

In 1995 a permanent quality department was established and made responsible for the implementation of a quality system and certification processes leading the ISO 9001 certification in 1997.

More generally the diverse critique regarding quality of products or processes have lead to incremental changes that, step by step, made the company a leading supplier of Chamber Doctor Blade technology and producer of the large flexo-printing machines. The first printing machine produced in 1993 was in fact a renovation of an existing machine for Tetra Pak in Mexico. In fact this renovation lead to the major reconstruction of the machine making it the first machine in the world with servomotors for adjusting printing.

Radical Critique, Compromising and the Construction of Organizational Change

A distinguishing feature of pragmatic sociology is that the different orders of worth are not linked to a specific field, as assumed, for example, by the Institutional Logics approach (Gond and Leca, 2011). In any situation, all orders of worth can be invoked by anyone to criticize, justify or set an agreement with others. This is the reason for the major importance given to the second form of critique in pragmatic sociology, *radical critique*. The radical critique proposes a different way of achieving a just reality by pointing to the relevance of alternative orders of worth.

The order of worth framework supplies a theoretical framework for analyzing different ways of reconciling competing orders of worth. Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) operate with three different

types of agreements: *clarification in one - dominating - world* at the expense of the other competing worlds; the *local arrangement* aiming at a temporary and local agreement around specific decisions; and the *compromise* aiming at a more durable agreement constructed at the basis of different worlds. The compromise is consolidated by specific constructions (*dispositifs*) that present a common justification based on different worlds.

When a critique pertaining to an alternative order of worth is successful it may contribute to novelty in organizations by a shift in dominant arrangements and their justifications. Critique is then, according to Boltanski, a key element in the unfolding of organizational practices since the social acceptance of particular forms of justifications are tested by continuous processes of critique, testing and adjustments of agreements in order to account for aspects of action that cannot be justified.

The goal of the *Licence to Act*-project was to develop knowledge of company values as well as implementing company values among employees. The company mission, vision and values presented at the company homepage are summarized below.

The mission, vision and value statement of the ACP-company

Mission

It is the stated objective of ACP to be innovative and creative in our efforts to ensure our customers the latest technology. It is the stated objective of ACP to create solutions in co-operation with the customers that will ensure growth and earnings for the customers. It is the stated objective of ACP to be a desirable company with a creative and good working environment.

Vision

It is the stated objective of ACP to be a world leading supplier for the graphic and packaging industry. It is a stated objective of ACP to be total supplier of full-line consignments and sub-supplier of high quality parts.

Values

The values of ACP are the basis of the company. The company was founded and operates on these values and we respect and observe them.

- ACP is reliable to employees and customers. **Trustworthiness** is rated highly.
- ACP will act ethically and **responsibly** towards employees, partners and customers.
- To increase a good working environment, the employees are highly **engaged**. To create optimum solutions we work in close co-operation with our customer.
- Every project can be **solved**.
- At ACP we are aware that **unique** solutions are only created through commitment.

The mission, vision and value statement may serve as an illustration of the compromise between conflicting orders of worth under construction during the Licence to Act-project. Applying the orders of worth framework, it is clear apparent that the *industrial order of worth* is very important. The company has a mission to ‘ensure our customers the latest technology’ and wants to be a supplier of ‘high quality parts’. The focus on solving problems professionally is stressed by stating that ‘every project can be solved’.

The importance of the *domestic order of worth* is visible in the mission, vision and value statement through the importance given to co-operation with customers, on the one side, and on the other side the importance of relations towards employees: ‘ACP is reliable to both employees and customers’ and ‘ACP is reliable to customers, and will act ethically and responsibly towards employees, partners and customers’.

The Market order of worth is part of the compromise but has a minor role, since it is the technical solutions (*Industrial*) created in co-operation with customers (*Domestic*) that ‘will ensure growth and earnings for the customer (*Market*)’. The compromise is then established as mastery of high quality technological solutions based on a close co-operation with customers and high-commitment, high-trust employee-management relations. It was particularly the second element in the local compromise the critique from employees was directed against. Many employees found that management was not following a high-trust leadership approach – or rather some managers did but other managers did not.

An important element of the background was that an earlier quality of work-life project had resulted in conflicts that deteriorated trust relations between management and employees. The managing director decided to stop the quality of work-project and instead to start the *Licence to Act* Project. Researchers involved in the abandoned quality of life project stated that ‘trust in management was at an unprecedented low level’ at the start of the Licence to Action-project in early 2006 (Sørensen et al., 2011). It was only after the first round of employee seminars (but before major actions were taken by management) that employees’ evaluation of the managing director were slowly changing apparently because some employees found the managing director began to act differently towards them, as explained by a machine worker:

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(In the department) we have been talking today about what the hell is making all the difference. It looks like (the managing director) is beginning to see us as partners instead of as opponents.

in the project coordination group the managing director had promised to take action on the issues raised by employees at the seminars. An important issue after the first round of employee seminars was then how management would respond to the list of critical issues raised by employees at the seminars presented to the managing director by the external consultants.

Summary of Management Consultants Report from Employee Seminars

- **Green zone – should be preserved and further developed**
Employees state they have very *competent colleagues*. Many are proud of their own skills and wish to be better. Employees are proud to produce *unique products*. Many express a willingness to work for the further development of the company to develop its potential to be a great company. Employees are generally feeling well in the company and find that working conditions in general are good.
- **Yellow zone – should be observed closely**
The geographical division of the company in two different plants creates a feeling among employees of two different cultures. New employees are not properly introduced to the company. Employees experience lack of clear and common goals – there is need of a clear strategy. Several characterise the management style of the company as based on control, not on trust.
- **Red zone - critical for the further development of the company**
Employees are frustrated by the variation in management styles experienced. Some managers apply an authoritarian management style – others a delegating and supporting style. There is need of a coherent management style and a more organic view of the company. There is experienced a lack of common spirit: it is 'me' and not 'we'. Information given is experienced very differently: from trivial, to lacking and to un-understandable information. Four out of six groups asked for the appointment of a HR manager to plan education, introduction of new employees, building a recruitment base and developing human resources generally.

As shown above, employees were quite critical of the variation in management styles experienced. This was particularly visible when a particular manager working in the US subsidiary went home and began applying an authoritarian management style. Employees were not accepting

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this style, since they saw themselves as committed employees sharing important values with the organization.

After some months of reflection in the management group and a seminar held in the US management actions were taken. One manager was fired due to the critique of different management styles raised at the employee seminars and the management group started to work on reducing the problems of different management styles.

This particular incidence in the *Licence to Act*-project show that radical critique may lead to the emergence of novelty in organization. Here it was a gradual change in management style that was more in line with the compromise reflected in the value statement.

Critique based on Conflicts of Regimes of Engagements

A third form of critique is related to the clashes between different regimes of engagement as proposed by Laurent Thévenot. The notion of regimes of engagements refers to a ‘vertical pluralism’, as opposed to a ‘horizontal pluralism’ between different orders of worth as was the case of the radical critique mentioned above.

Pragmatic Regimes of Engagement

	<i>Regime of familiarity</i>	<i>Regime of regular planned action</i>	<i>Regime of justification</i>
Which good is engaged?	Personal and local convenience within a familiar milieu	Successful conventional action	Collective conventions of the common good
Which reality is engaged?	Usual and used surroundings providing a distributed capacity	Functional instrument	‘Qualified’ object
What is the format of relevant information?	Local and idiosyncratic perceptual clue	Ordinary semantics of action	Codification
Which kind of agency is construed?	A personality attached to his or her entourage	Planner	‘Qualified’ person

Source: (Thévenot, 2001b)

As mentioned above, Thévenot distinguishes between three regimes of engagement, the *regime of familiar engagement*, the local and personalized attachment to the world; the *regime of engagement with a plan*, involving plans and projects and drawing on the liberal grammar of individual choice; and the *regime of publicly justifiable engagement* explored in *On Justification*.

In relation to conflicts between different regimes of engagements criticism may be related to the ‘complaint of *undue sacrifice*’ (Thévenot, 2011a, p.387) caused by tensions between the different regimes of engagement. In the company an example of such a clash was the problem experienced in the *Licence to Act-project* with the ‘traditional’ blue collar workers who silently rejected to be part of the project. Without stating their rejection openly they did not participate in the meetings and activities with other employees in the department but performed their job as usual. They rejected changing their work habits and their daily routines. This created major tension with the other workers involved in the *Licence to Act-project*. Managers did not really know how to handle this tension since the ‘traditional’ employees were very efficient and respected employees. These employees rejected taking the *undue sacrifice* of transforming familiar engagement and routines towards collaboration with other colleagues as intended in the *License to Act-project*. What especially caused harm among other employees was that management were reluctant applying sanctions toward these employees.

Summary and Discussion: Criticisms as Simultaneous Processes

In this section I summarize and discuss how introducing criticism as an important source for the continuous production of novelty in organizations contributes to acknowledging the productive role of critique in organizations. The particular perspective of Pragmatic Sociology helps revealing the continuous mobilization of ‘small’ criticism actors do as part of their daily interaction. More generally the analysis of the dynamics of processes of critique, tests and justification reveal the importance of these processes for organizational novelty and change.

Pragmatic Sociology, in the words of Jean-Pascal Gond and Bernard Leca, ‘focuses on the mundane and daily disputes, the accumulation of which is likely to result in either the conservation of the existing institutional order or its shift’ (Gond and Leca, 2011, p. 22). Following this perspective critique may both lead to the maintenance of stability as a result of the further justification of dominant orders of worth, or in change in the way the dominant order of worth is

actually performed in action and linked to objects, or in a more radical form of change, involving a variety of new ways that plural orders of worth could be reconciled.

These three critical processes discussed here reminds of the three different mechanisms leading to institutional maintenance elaborated by Benjamin Taupin (Taupin, 2012). The first is confirmation work in which the actors repeat or reformulate the existing arrangement or simply refuse to take part in the debate. The second involves qualifying objects according to existing concepts. The third is the model of the circular figure based on the actors' inability to resolve a debate involving several orders of worth. Benjamin Taupin suggests that these three processes evolve simultaneously.

In the same way the three different forms of critique discussed in this paper may be seen as three simultaneous processes leading to organizational novelty in three radically different ways. While the reformist critique leads to the emergence of new product and processes over time, the radical critique may lead to major reorientations in organizational culture and values. The last form for critique related to conflicts between regimes of engagements may be more difficult to relate to a particular type of change.

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